Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

NEW Directions

March 5, 2007

Putting stewardship into action is at the heart of the ministry's transitional work. Many key elements need to come together to add up to this important cultural change over time. "How do you change culture? It's a simple question and it's a very complex answer," Assistant Deputy Minister Debbie Fischer says.

Stewardship in Action

Debbie Fischer and her team have been busy ensuring that the key elements required to drive stewardship forward are being put into place. Making stewardship operational in the ministry involves a multi-layered transformation that is part structural, part process and part cultural, Fischer said.

Structural changes, such as the creation of Local Health Integration Networks and the new divisions and branches within the ministry, are the short-term "nuts and bolts" components of putting stewardship into action, Fischer said. Changing the culture of the ministry is the longer-term work that is vital to sustaining stewardship over time.

Cultural transformation is very much about people

"Cultural transformation is in part about the type of leaders who are in place to effect change. You have to have leaders who engage and excite staff to make change happen," Fischer said. But stewardship also needs champions at all levels of the ministry because it is not a model directed from the top. If ministry staff takes the approach of just waiting for commands from above, then stewardship cannot flourish, according to Fischer. Stewardship requires shared ownership and a collective mindset shift.

The transition to stewardship, like any major change, needs to be supported and reinforced with the right tools, Fischer explained. "Stewardship needs to be reinforced through training and learning programs, clear accountabilities and role clarification. It also needs to be reinforced through rewards, recognition and incentives."

The ministry has already put a number of training and learning programs in place to help staff better understand stewardship and the competencies they will need as the ministry takes on its full stewardship role. As managers begin to work with their staff directly in the new divisions, the cultural shift towards stewardship will begin to take root and evolve.

The ministry has to work through the challenge of determining what it means to work functionally in a stewardship model. "We're working in a system where LHINs are taking on much of the operational management work we

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Stewardship in *Action*

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used to do, so our role is now different," Fischer acknowledged. "We're not on the ground anymore. At the same time, we need to have enough information about what is on the ground so we can set the right strategic direction for the future."

Staff at all levels has to first understand that our work will be different and then be engaged to work differently in the new system, Fischer added. She noted that in the past, divisions within the ministry have worked largely in isolated silos.

"We're not going to be organized in groups that do their work in isolation any longer. Instead, we're going to work across divisions in teams and we're going to have very high dependencies on each other. The divisions will be organized by function and each division will have a particular expertise that can be used across the ministry," Fischer said.

But how exactly will staff interact and work under the new model? "We have to have shared accountability across the ministry for delivering results. How do we work in teams and have the same accountability for delivery as we did within discrete program areas, where it was much more explicit? That's the challenge that all of us will need to work on together to find the right answers. That's what stewardship is about."

To help focus, bring clarity and inspire the ministry's leadership around engaging and putting stewardship into action, a major conference is being held in Toronto on March 7 for the ministry's senior managers.

Peter Block, an internationally renowned author on stewardship and organizational change, and two of his colleagues are being brought in to facilitate the day-long conference that will immerse managers in a dialogue on initiating and sustaining change. "The goal is to give managers a greater sense of clarity, excitement and engagement around stewardship," said Bill Brewer, director of client relations at Block's consulting firm designedLearning.

Block, Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford and Fischer will all be on hand at the conference to present their vision, insights and views on stewardship. But much of the conference will be devoted to workshops where managers in small groups, can candidly share their goals, their hopes and their concerns about moving to the new stewardship model.

"If you want to change a culture, you have to change the conversations people have about their work," Brewer said. "The aim is to create an opportunity to change how people are talking peer to peer," he added.

Participants will be asked to explore their sense of the possibilities, ownership, and their level of commitment as well as their doubts about putting stewardship into action. "This is a chance to bring the conversation down to an intimate level on: 'How do we get to a full stewardship model from here'," Brewer explained. "It's about bringing the discussion of stewardship from a system level to an individual level." Moreover, it is an opportunity to give a broad cross-section of senior managers a voice in this pivotal change that is transforming their working lives.

"People only engage when their voices are heard," Brewer said.

This process of defining and refining the ministry's evolving culture to stewardship will be continuous and ongoing, Fischer said. "I don't believe we'll ever be finished. I believe in continuous improvement. This will be an ongoing process of cultural change." ■

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Evolving a New Management Style

How one branch of the ministry transformed itself

Malcolm Bates, director of the Emergency Health Services (EHS) Branch, has learned to practice some of the basic principles of stewardship. Bates took over as head of the branch, which oversees the province's ambulance system, in 2001, when responsibility for delivering land ambulance services was shifted to the municipal sector.

The transition occurred as part of the former Ontario government's Local Services Realignment initiative announced in May 1997, which transferred the delivery of a broad range of services from the provincial to the local level, including land ambulance services and public health.

The transfer triggered both a structural as well as a cultural transformation that required Bates' team to learn to work differently and to do different work.

"We used to dictate how many ambulances were needed in each community, whether they were diesel or gas, and whether they had Michelin tires," Bates said. "We were very involved in directing the day-to-day operations. The ministry approved everything right down to replacing tires on ambulances."

"The transfer meant switching our whole head space from directing first hand to directing through performance agreements," added Dennis Brown, the branch's senior manager, operations and quality management.

"We're strategic managers now, rather than program delivery managers," Bates explained.

How did the Emergency Health Services Branch, headquartered at 5700 Yonge St., transition away from micromanaging? The director and his staff conceded they had to navigate a challenging road, which many times along the way required them to reverse their thinking, demanded increasing levels of flexibility and the continual need to reassure one another that the branch was on the correct path.

"It all comes back to the leadership of the organization being willing to allow and be open to the exploration of new ideas," Brown said. "You need a different set of tools to be a strategic manager. You turn into a diplomat and a facilitator. You have to depend upon your co-workers and stakeholders."

Although the Emergency Health Services (EHS) Branch is not included in the program areas slated for review in the transition schedule for 2007, an internal restructuring that this branch underwent six years ago, can lend insight and food for thought as the ministry progresses towards its transition goals.

According to Bates, when ultimate accountability and oversight becomes further removed from service delivery, clearly defined standards and expectations have to be put in place. In addition, a strong network of communication must be maintained to ensure that a high quality of service is being provided locally, and at the same time, that the stewards are effectively guiding the system as a whole on both a strategic and an operational basis. Communication is further enhanced through regular liaison and contact with stakeholders at all levels of the system.

This forces all the parties involved to sit down and think about and clearly define what needs to get done and why, said Bates.

"Our role is now about quality assurance, standard setting and stakeholder relations. Quality management starts with good standards and performance agreements in place," Bates explained.

The performance agreements were critical in spelling out the roles and expectations to be fulfilled by all stakeholders. These agreements were a key tool for the branch staff in their new role as strategic managers, Bates said.

The delivery of service in accordance with those standards is supported by ministry-led, peer-focused compliance reviews, while patient care issues are reviewed by a clinically based committee, called the Quality Council, which was set up by the Emergency Health Services Branch. The council, which includes a senior branch staff member, a hospital-based physician and paramedics from various ambulance services across Ontario, was set up to review serious infractions of patient care standards by paramedics.

Free from managing the day-to-day delivery of services and crisis management, Bates and his staff were able to focus more on long-term planning for the ambulance system as a whole.

It is still necessary to have a good sense of what is happening at the local level, in order to best guide and direct the system overall. "We are constantly working with our stakeholders to improve how we do things," Brown said. "Stewards need to be strong communicators and need to build good relationships with stakeholders."

Although ambulance services are locally delivered in municipalities all across the province, it is the stewardship oversight that allows for the overall system to operate in a cohesive manner. "We have 62 ambulance services in 50 municipalities, under one provincial system," Bates said. One of the greatest challenges during the transition process, he explained, was maintaining 24-hour mission critical service delivery, while the system was in a state of flux and transition.

Coping with his own doubts, insecurities and natural anxiety as well as those of his staff during the transition was also a challenge to be overcome, said Brown, who has been with the ministry since 1976.

"When you have to change the way you do things, right away people's anxiety level goes up. As a leader, you have to invest the time and help

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everyone bridge the major transition. You have to recognize that it does take time for people to adjust to change," Brown said. "Staff needed re-assurances pretty much every day."

One simple strategy Brown used with his team was a graphic of a bull's eye target with the word **patient** written in the centre. He gave each member of his team a copy of the graphic and asked them to hang it up at their work stations. "I wanted staff to have a visual reminder that although they were going through many changes and having to approach things differently, better service for the patient was at the centre of the transition."

"You need to have a culture of tolerance, not only of outcomes, but a tolerance for the need for change," Brown added.

Angeline Selvadurai was working as a senior financial analyst with the Emergency Health Services Branch during the transition. The entire financial team had to change not only the way they did their jobs, but also their mindset and attitude about their roles.

"It was a team effort. It required a mind change from staff at all levels — everyone had to change their approach and their way of doing their jobs," Selvadurai said.

"For the financial team, the transition meant we were no longer managing budgets, going line by line, looking at every financial detail. We had to move to strategic management and come up with accountability mechanisms to ensure the funds the ministry was providing were being spent appropriately by those delivering the service," Selvadurai explained.

Selvadurai acknowledged that the transition was indeed a challenge because the staff was so used to micromanaging the ambulance service system. "It was difficult at first because we had to change our ways of dealing with stakeholders. But over time, we were comfortable and confident in our new roles," said Selvadurai, who is now acting manager of financial planning, reporting and monitoring at the branch.

At the end of the day, Bates said, moving to a stewardship model has delivered higher quality ambulance services to communities across the province. Transferring the service to the local level and closer to communities resulted in more community interest and input, which resulted in improvements. Once communities assumed a sense of ownership of their ambulance service, there was a greater level of local involvement to ensure a higher quality of service was being provided.

"We don't dictate what the ambulance services do and how they do it. If they want to go in a certain direction, as long as they meet provincial standards, then more power to them. In practice, the standards as set out by the ministry have generally been surpassed. The level of service improved over and above what we could ever have done," Bates acknowledged.

"We are confident of the quality of the service being provided because of the standards that are in place and the accountability and pressure at the local level. We have a greater level of confidence than we had in the past that the service being provided is at a high level," Bates said.

In terms of the branch, the transition brought the need for new skill sets and competencies. "You need a different set of skills than under direct service delivery. You have to have people who can gather information and who can do the analysis. We need people who know how to conduct audits. We need people who can identify risks and do multi-year planning," Bates said.

"Looking back, leadership was key in easing the transition to stewardship. It helps to have a champion, who can articulate the vision of change," Brown explained.

Bates said he recognized early on that as head of the branch, the change of mindset had to start with him. "You really have to make yourself an advocate for change," he said. "You have to become accustomed to the fact that things have changed and things will be done differently. The more you go through it the more you become an advocate of stewardship."

Six years later, Bates and his staff have a strong sense of satisfaction of having successfully navigated a challenging transition. The branch staff possesses the skill set to address and respond to ongoing change.

"We not only transformed the ambulance system, we transformed ourselves," Bates said. "We are now stewards in a big way of a major system and we're proud of it, and of what our team at EHS does and how we do it." ■

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Rama Mnjikaning EMS Photo

Malcolm Bates (right), director of the Emergency Health Services Branch, and Darryl Culley, manager of Rama Mnjikaning Emergency Management Services, pose beside an ambulance with a distinctive aboriginal design. The Rama Mnjikaning's First Nations service started operating on July 20, 2006. The ministry's transition to local service delivery six years ago, allows community ambulance services more autonomy on day-to-day decision-making, including the look of their vehicles.

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